


Rudolf Steiner

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Born	Rudolf Joseph Lorenz Steiner 25(27?) February 1861 Murakirály, Austria-Hungary (now Donji Kraljevec, Croatia)
Died	30 March 1925 (aged 64) Dornach, Switzerland
Era	20th-century philosophy
Region	Western Philosophy
School	Holism, Monism
Main interests	Metaphysics, Epistemology, Philosophy of science, Esotericism, Christianity, Spiritual Science, Freemasonry
Notable ideas	Anthroposophy, Anthroposophical Medicine, Biodynamic Agriculture, Eurythmy, Spiritual Science, Waldorf Education

Rudolf Joseph Lorenz Steiner^[1] (25/27 February 1861^[2] – 30 March 1925) was an Austrian philosopher, social reformer, architect, and esotericist.^{[3][4]} Steiner gained initial recognition as a literary critic and cultural philosopher. At the beginning of the 20th century, he founded a spiritual movement, Anthroposophy, as an esoteric philosophy growing out of idealist philosophy and with links to Theosophy.

Steiner led this movement through several phases. In the first, more philosophically oriented phase, Steiner attempted to find a synthesis between science and mysticism;^[5] his philosophical work of these years, which he termed *spiritual science*, sought to provide a connection between the cognitive path of Western philosophy and the inner and spiritual needs of the human being.^{[6]:291} In a second phase, beginning around 1907, he began working collaboratively in a variety of artistic media, including drama, the movement arts (developing a new artistic form, *eurythmy*) and architecture, culminating in the building of the Goetheanum, a cultural centre to house all the arts. In the third phase of his work, beginning after World War One, Steiner worked to establish various practical endeavors, including Waldorf education, biodynamic agriculture, and anthroposophical medicine.^[7]

Steiner advocated a form of ethical individualism, to which he later brought a more explicitly spiritual component. He based his epistemology on Johann Wolfgang Goethe's world view, in which "Thinking ... is no more and no less an organ of perception than the eye or ear. Just as the eye perceives colours and the ear sounds, so thinking perceives ideas."^[8] A consistent thread that runs from his earliest philosophical phase through his later spiritual orientation is

the goal of demonstrating that there are no essential limits to human knowledge.^[9]

Biography

Childhood and education

Steiner's father, Johann(es) Steiner (23 June 1829, Geras or Trabenreith, Innfritz-Messern and lived Geras Abbey, Waldviertel – 1910, Horn), left a position as a gamekeeper^[10] in the service of Count Hoyos in Geras, northeast Lower Austria to marry one of the Hoyos family's housemaids, Franziska Blie (8 May 1834, Horn, Waldviertel – 1918, Horn), a marriage for which the Count had refused his permission. Johann became a telegraph operator on the Southern Austrian Railway, and at the time of Rudolf's birth was stationed in *Kraljevec* in the *Muraköz* region, then part of the Austrian Empire (present-day Donji Kraljevec, Međimurje region, northernmost Croatia). In the first two years of Rudolf's life, the family moved twice, first to Mödling, near Vienna, and then, through the promotion of his father to stationmaster, to Pottschach, located in the foothills of the eastern Austrian Alps in Lower Austria.^[7]

Steiner entered the village school; following a disagreement between his father and the schoolmaster, he was briefly educated at home. In 1869 the family moved to the village of Neudörfel (near Wiener Neustadt), and in 1879 to Inzersdorf. The latter move was to enable Steiner to attend the Vienna Institute of Technology, where he studied mathematics, physics, chemistry, botany, biology, literature, and philosophy on an academic scholarship from 1879 to 1883, at the end of which time he withdrew from the university.^{[11]:446[12]:29} In 1882, one of Steiner's teachers, Karl Julius Schröer, suggested Steiner's name to Joseph Kürschner, chief editor of an important new edition of Goethe's works,^[13] who asked Steiner to become the edition's natural science editor,^[14] a truly astonishing opportunity for a young student without any form of academic credentials or previous publications.^{[12]:43}

In 1891, Steiner earned a doctorate in philosophy at the University of Rostock in Germany with a thesis based upon Fichte's concept of the ego,^[6] later published in expanded form as *Truth and Knowledge*.^[15]

Early spiritual experiences

When he was nine years old, Steiner thought he saw the spirit of an aunt who had died in a far-off town asking him to help her; at the time of the vision neither he nor his family knew of the woman's death.^[16]

At 21, on the train between his home village and Vienna, Steiner met a herb gatherer, Felix Kogutzki, who spoke about the spiritual world "as one who had his own experience therein..."^{[17]:39–40} Kogutzki

conveyed to Steiner a knowledge of nature that was non-academic and spiritual; soon thereafter Steiner began to read Goethe's works on natural science. According to Steiner, he also introduced Steiner to a person that Steiner only identified as a "Master", and who had a great influence on Steiner's subsequent development, in particular directing him to study Fichte's philosophy.^[18]

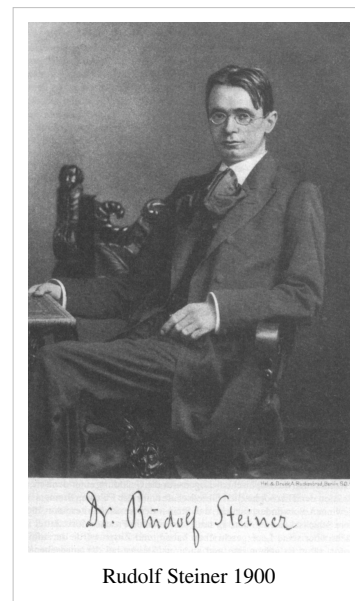


The house where Rudolf Steiner was born, in modern Croatia

Writer and philosopher

In 1888, as a result of his work for the Kürschner edition of Goethe's works, Steiner was invited to work as an editor at the Goethe archives in Weimar. Steiner remained with the archive until 1896. As well as the introductions for and commentaries to four volumes of Goethe's scientific writings, Steiner wrote two books about Goethe's philosophy: *The Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World-Conception* (1886),^[19] which Steiner later regarded as the epistemological foundation and justification for every thing he had later said and published,^[20] and *Goethe's Conception of the World* (1897).^[21] During this time he also collaborated in complete editions of the works of Arthur Schopenhauer and the writer Jean Paul and wrote numerous articles for various journals.

During his time at the archives, Steiner wrote *Die Philosophie der Freiheit* (*The Philosophy of Freedom* or *The Philosophy of Spiritual Activity*—Steiner's preferred English title) (1894), an exploration of epistemology and ethics that suggested a path upon which humans can become spiritually free beings. Steiner later spoke of this book as containing implicitly, in philosophical form, the entire content of what he later developed explicitly as anthroposophy.^[22]



In 1896, Elisabeth Förster-Nietzsche asked Steiner to help organize the Nietzsche archive in Naumburg. Her brother by that time was *non compos mentis*. Förster-Nietzsche introduced Steiner into the presence of the catatonic philosopher; Steiner, deeply moved, subsequently wrote the book *Friedrich Nietzsche, Fighter for Freedom*. Steiner later related, "Nietzsche's ideas of the 'eternal recurrence' and of 'Übermensch' remained long in my mind. For in these was reflected that which a personality must feel concerning the evolution and essential being of humanity when this personality is kept back from grasping the spiritual world by the restricted thought in the philosophy of nature characterizing the end of the 19th century....What attracted me particularly was that one could read Nietzsche without coming upon anything which strove to make the reader a 'dependent' of Nietzsche's."^[17]

In 1897, Steiner left the Weimar archives and moved to Berlin. He became part owner, chief editor, and an active contributor to the literary journal *Magazin für Literatur*, where he hoped to find a readership sympathetic to his philosophy. Many subscribers were alienated by Steiner's unpopular support of Émile Zola in the Dreyfus Affair^[23] and the journal lost more subscribers when Steiner published extracts from his correspondence with anarchist John Henry Mackay.^[23] Dissatisfaction with his editorial style eventually led to his departure from the magazine.

In 1899, Steiner married Anna Eunicke; the couple separated several years later. Anna died in 1911.

The Theosophical Society

In 1899, Steiner published an article, "Goethe's Secret Revelation", discussing the esoteric nature of Goethe's fairy tale *The Green Snake and the Beautiful Lily*. This article led to an invitation by the Count and Countess Brockdorff to speak to a gathering of Theosophists on the subject of Nietzsche. Steiner continued speaking regularly to the members of the Theosophical Society, becoming the head of its newly constituted German section in 1902 without ever formally joining the society.^{[6][24]} By 1904, Steiner was appointed by Annie Besant to be leader of the Theosophical *Esoteric Society* for Germany and Austria. It was also within this society that Steiner met and worked with Marie von Sivers, who became his second wife in 1914.



Marie Steiner 1903

The German Section of the Theosophical Society grew rapidly under Steiner's leadership as he lectured throughout much of Europe on his spiritual science.

During this period, Steiner maintained an original approach, replacing Madame Blavatsky's terminology with his own, and basing his spiritual research and teachings upon the Western esoteric and philosophical tradition. This and other differences, in particular Steiner's vocal rejection of Leadbeater and Besant's claim that Jiddu Krishnamurti was the vehicle of a new *Maitreya*, or world teacher,^[25] led to a formal split in 1912/13,^[6] when Steiner and the majority of members of the German section of the Theosophical Society broke off to form a new group, the Anthroposophical Society.

The Anthroposophical Society and its cultural activities



English sculptor Edith Maryon belonged to the innermost circle of founders of anthroposophy and headed the Section of Fine Arts at the Goetheanum

The Anthroposophical Society grew rapidly. Fueled by a need to find a home for their yearly conferences, which included performances of plays written by Eduard Schuré as well as Steiner himself, the decision was made to build a theater and organizational center. In 1913, construction began on the first Goetheanum building, in Dornach, Switzerland. The building, designed by Steiner, was built to a significant part by volunteers who offered craftsmanship or simply a will to learn new skills. Once World War I started in 1914, the Goetheanum volunteers could hear the sound of cannon fire beyond the Swiss border, but despite the war, people from all over Europe worked peaceably side by side on the building's construction.

Beginning in 1919, Steiner was called upon to assist with numerous practical activities (see below), including the first Waldorf school, founded that year in Stuttgart, Germany. His lecture activity expanded enormously. At the same time, the Goetheanum developed as a wide-ranging cultural centre. On New Year's Eve, 1922/1923, the building burned to the ground; contemporary police reports indicate arson as the probable cause.^{[7]:752[26]:796} Steiner immediately began work designing a second Goetheanum building – this time made of concrete instead of wood – which was completed in 1928, three years

after his death.

In 1923, Steiner founded a School of Spiritual Science, intended as an "organ of initiative" for research and study and as "the soul of the Anthroposophical Society".^[27] This included a general course of study based on meditative exercises (intended to guide a meditant from «the spiritual in the human being to the spiritual in the universe.»)^[28]

and research departments focusing on areas such as education, medicine, agriculture, art, natural science, social science, and literature. Steiner spoke of laying the Foundation Stone of the new society in the hearts of his listeners.

Social reform

Steiner became a well-known and controversial public figure during and after World War I. In response to the catastrophic situation in post-war Germany, he proposed extensive social reforms through the establishment of a Threefold Social Order in which the cultural, political and economic realms would be largely independent. Steiner argued that a fusion of the three realms had created the inflexibility that had led to catastrophes such as World War I. In connection with this, he promoted a radical solution in the disputed area of Upper Silesia, claimed by both Poland and Germany; his suggestion that this area be granted at least provisional independence led to his being publicly accused of being a traitor to Germany.^[29]

In 1919, Steiner's chief work on social reform (English title: *Toward Social Renewal*) was released simultaneously in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland and sold some 80,000 copies in the first year.

Attacks, illness, and death

Right-wing groups had been rapidly gaining strength in Germany. In 1919, the political theorist of the National Socialist movement in Germany, Dietrich Eckart, attacked Steiner and suggested that he was a Jew.^[30] In 1921, Adolf Hitler attacked Steiner in an article in the right-wing *Völkischer Beobachter* newspaper that included accusations that Steiner was a tool of the Jews,^[31] and other nationalist extremists in Germany called up a "war against Steiner". In 1922 a lecture in Munich was disrupted when stink bombs were let off and the lights switched out.^{[32][33]} Unable to guarantee his safety, Steiner's agents cancelled a next lecture tour.^{[23]:193[34]} The 1923 Beer Hall Putsch in Munich led Steiner to give up his residence in Berlin, saying that if those responsible for the attempted coup [Hitler and others] came to power in Germany, it would no longer be possible for him to enter the country;^[35] he also warned against the disastrous effects it would have for Central Europe if the National Socialists came to power.^{[30]:8}

The loss of the Goetheanum affected Steiner's health seriously. From 1923 on, he showed signs of increasing frailness and illness. He continued to lecture widely, and even to travel; especially towards the end of this time, he was often giving two, three or even four lectures daily for courses taking place concurrently. Many of these were about practical areas of life such as education; simultaneously, however, Steiner began an extensive series of lectures presenting his research on the successive incarnations of various individualities, and on the technique of karma research generally.^[36]

Increasingly ill, his last lecture was held in September 1924. He continued work on his autobiography during the last months of his life; he died on 30 March 1925.

Spiritual research

According to his later descriptions, Steiner had begun having spiritual experiences as a child, but only felt prepared to speak about them as a mature adult.^[23] His first public articulations referring to spiritual experiences or phenomena began in his lectures to the Theosophical Society of 1899. By 1901 he had begun to write about spiritual topics, initially in the form of discussions of historical figures such as the mystics of the Middle Ages. By 1904 he was clearly expressing his own understanding of these themes in his essays and books, though continuing to refer to a wide variety of historical sources.

Steiner aimed to apply his training in mathematics, science, and philosophy to produce rigorous, verifiable presentations of those experiences.^[37] He believed that through freely chosen ethical disciplines and meditative training, anyone could develop the ability to experience the spiritual world, including the higher nature of oneself and others.^[23] Steiner believed that such discipline and training would help a person to become a more moral, creative and free individual – free in the sense of being capable of actions motivated solely by love.^[38]

Steiner's philosophical ideas were influenced by Franz Brentano,^[23] with whom he had studied, and Wilhelm Dilthey, both founders of the phenomenological movement in European philosophy, as well as Fichte, Hegel, and Schelling. Steiner was also strongly influenced by Goethe's phenomenological approach to science.^{[23][39][40]}

Steiner led the following esoteric schools:

- His independent *Esoteric School* of the Theosophical Society, founded in 1904. This school continued after the break with Theosophy but was disbanded at the start of World War I.
- A lodge called *Mystica Aeterna* within the Masonic Order of Memphis and Mizraim, which Steiner led from 1906 until around 1914. Steiner added to the Masonic rite a number of Rosicrucian references.^[41] The figure of Christian Rosenkreutz also plays an important role in several of his later lectures.
- The School of Spiritual Science of the Anthroposophical Society, founded in 1923 as a further development of his earlier Esoteric School. The School of Spiritual Science was intended to have three "classes", but only the first of these was developed in Steiner's lifetime. All the texts relating to the School of Spiritual Science have been published in the full edition of Steiner's works.

Breadth of activity

After the First World War, Steiner became active in a wide variety of cultural contexts. He founded a number of schools, the first of which was known as the Waldorf school,^[42] and which later evolved into a worldwide school network. He also founded a system of organic agriculture, now known as Biodynamic agriculture, which was one of the very first forms of, and has contributed significantly to the development of, modern organic farming.^[43] His work in medicine led to the development of a broad range of complementary medications and supportive artistic and biographic therapies.^[44] Homes for children and adults with developmental disabilities based on his work (including those of the Camphill movement) are widespread.^[45] His paintings and drawings influenced Joseph Beuys and other modern artists. His two Goetheanum buildings are generally accepted to be masterpieces of modern architecture,^{[46][47]} and other anthroposophical architects have contributed thousands of buildings to the modern scene. One of the first institutions to practice ethical banking was an anthroposophical bank working out of Steiner's ideas; other anthroposophical social finance institutions have since been founded.

Steiner's literary estate is correspondingly broad. Steiner's writings, published in about forty volumes, include books, essays, four plays ('mystery dramas'), mantric verse, and an autobiography. His collected lectures, making up another approximately 300 volumes, discuss an extremely wide range of themes. Steiner's drawings, chiefly illustrations done on blackboards during his lectures, are collected in a separate series of 28 volumes. Many publications have covered his architectural legacy and sculptural work.

Education

As a young man, Steiner already supported the independence of educational institutions from governmental control. In 1907, he wrote an essay on "Education in the Light of Spiritual Science", in which he described the major phases of child development that were later to form the foundation of his approach to education.

In 1919, Emil Molt invited him to lecture to his workers at the Waldorf-Astoria cigarette factory in Stuttgart. Out of these lectures came a new school, the Waldorf school. In 1922, Steiner brought these ideas to Oxford at the invitation of Professor Millicent Mackenzie and the Oxford Conference led to the founding of Waldorf schools in



The Waldorf school in Verrières-le-Buisson
(France)

Britain.^[48] During Steiner's lifetime, schools based on his educational principles were also founded in Hamburg, Essen, The Hague and London; there are now more than 1000 Waldorf schools worldwide.

Social activism

For a period after World War I, Steiner was extremely active as a lecturer on social reform. A petition expressing his basic social ideas (signed by Herman Hesse, among others) was very widely circulated.

His chief book on social reform, *Toward Social Renewal*, sold tens of thousands of copies in his lifetime. In this, Steiner suggested that the cultural, political and economic spheres of society need to work together as consciously cooperating yet independent entities. Each of these three realms has a particular task: political institutions should establish political equality and protect human rights; cultural institutions should cultivate the free and unhindered development of such realms as science, art, education and religion; and economic institutions should encourage producers, distributors and consumers to cooperate to provide for society's needs.^[49] He saw the establishment of what he called Threefold Social Order as a vital response to what he saw as an already visible trend toward the mutual independence of these three realms. Steiner saw theocracy, conventional shareholder capitalism, and state socialism as attempts by, respectively, cultural, economic, and governmental institutions to dominate the others. In the present day, he suggested, such attempts by any one of these spheres to manipulate another would be contrary to society's interests; such negative mutual influences would include e.g. corporate pressure on governments, state attempts to interfere with science, education, or religion, or religious influences on governmental entities.

- The cultural realm (science, art, religion, education, and the press) requires and fosters freedom;
- The political realm requires and fosters equality;
- The economic realm requires and fosters cooperation and solidarity.

Steiner also gave suggestions for many specific social reforms.

Architecture and visual arts

Steiner designed 17 buildings, including the First and Second Goetheanums. These two buildings, built in Dornach, Switzerland, were intended to house significant theater spaces as well as a School for Spiritual Science. Three of Steiner's buildings have been listed amongst the most significant works of modern architecture.^[50]



First Goetheanum

His primary sculptural work is *The Representative of Humanity* (1922), a nine-meter high wood sculpture executed as a joint project with the sculptor Edith Maryon and now on permanent display at the Goetheanum.

Steiner's blackboard drawings were unique at the time and almost certainly not originally intended as art works. Josef Beuys' work, itself heavily influenced by Steiner, has led to the modern understanding of Steiner's drawings as artistic objects.^[51]

Performing arts

Together with Marie Steiner-von Sivers, Rudolf Steiner developed the art of eurythmy, sometimes referred to as "visible speech and song". According to the principles of eurythmy, there are archetypal movements or gestures that correspond to every aspect of speech – the sounds (or phonemes), the rhythms, and the grammatical function – to every "soul quality" – joy, despair, tenderness, etc. – and to every aspect of music – tones, intervals, rhythms, and harmonies.

As a playwright, Steiner wrote four "Mystery Dramas" between 1909 and 1913, including *The Portal of Initiation* and *The Soul's Awakening*. They are still performed today by Anthroposophical groups.^[52]

Steiner also founded a new approach to artistic speech, or "speech formation", and drama. Michael Chekhov took up and extended Steiner's approach in what is now known as the *Chekhov method* of acting.^[53]



The Representative of Humanity
(detail)

Anthroposophical medicine

From the late 1910s, Steiner was working with doctors to create a new approach to medicine. In 1921, pharmacists and physicians gathered under Steiner's guidance to create a pharmaceutical company called Weleda which now distributes natural medical products worldwide. At around the same time, Dr. Ita Wegman founded a first anthroposophic medical clinic (now the Ita Wegman Clinic) in Arlesheim.

Biodynamic farming and gardening

In 1924, a group of farmers concerned about the future of agriculture requested Steiner's help. Steiner responded with a lecture series on an ecological and sustainable approach to agriculture that increased soil fertility without the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides.^[54] Steiner's agricultural ideas promptly spread and were put to the test internationally^[55] and Biodynamic agriculture is now practiced widely in Europe,^[56] North America, Asia^[56] and Australasia.^{[57][58][59]}

A central aspect of biodynamics is that the farm as a whole is seen as an organism, and therefore should be a largely self-sustaining system, producing its own manure and animal feed. Plant or animal disease is seen as a symptom of problems in the whole organism. Steiner also suggested timing agricultural activities such as sowing, weeding, and harvesting to utilize the influences on plant growth of the moon and planets; and the application of natural materials prepared in specific ways to the soil, compost, and crops, with the intention of engaging non-physical beings and elemental forces. He encouraged his listeners to verify his suggestions empirically, as he had not yet done.^[57]

Philosophical development

Goethean science

In his commentaries on Goethe's scientific works, written between 1884 and 1897, Steiner presented Goethe's approach to science as essentially phenomenological in nature, rather than theory- or model-based. He developed this conception further in several books, *The Theory of Knowledge Implicit in Goethe's World-Conception* (1886) and *Goethe's Conception of the World* (1897), particularly emphasizing the transformation in Goethe's approach from the physical sciences, where experiment played the primary role, to plant biology, where imagination was required to find the biological archetypes (*Urpflanze*), and postulated that Goethe had sought but been unable to fully find the further transformation in scientific thinking necessary to properly interpret and understand the animal kingdom.^[60]

Steiner defended Goethe's qualitative description of color as arising synthetically from the polarity of light and darkness, in contrast to Newton's particle-based and analytic conception. Steiner documented Goethe's success in documenting the evolutionary and transformational aspects of plants and celebrated Goethe's appreciation of plant archetypes (*Urpflanze*). Steiner speculated Goethe had sought, but been unable to find altogether, a corresponding metamorphosis in animal biology.^[60] He emphasized the role of evolutionary thinking in Goethe's discovery of the intermaxillary bone in human beings; Goethe expected human anatomy to be an evolutionary transformation of animal anatomy.^[60]

Knowledge and freedom

Steiner approached the philosophical questions of knowledge and freedom in two stages. The first was his dissertation, published in expanded form in 1892 as *Truth and Knowledge*. Here Steiner suggests that there is an inconsistency between Kant's philosophy, which posits that knowledge is representation and that the essential verity of the world is inaccessible to human consciousness, and modern science, which assumes that all influences can be found in what Steiner termed the "sinnlichen und geistlichen" (sensory and mental/spiritual) world to which we have access. Steiner terms Kant's "Jenseits-Philosophie" (philosophy of an inaccessible beyond) a stumbling block in achieving a satisfying philosophical viewpoint.^[61]

Steiner postulates that the world is essentially an indivisible unity, but that our consciousness divides it into the sense-perceptible appearance, on the one hand, and the formal nature accessible to our thinking, on the other. He sees in thinking itself an element that can be strengthened and deepened sufficiently to penetrate all that our senses do not reveal to us. Steiner thus explicitly denies all justification to a division between faith and knowledge; otherwise expressed, between the spiritual and natural worlds. Their apparent duality is conditioned by the structure of our consciousness, which separates perception and thinking, but these two faculties give us two complementary views of the same world; neither has primacy and the two together are necessary and sufficient to arrive at a complete understanding of the world. In thinking about perception (the path of natural science) and perceiving the process of thinking (the path of spiritual training), it is possible to discover a hidden inner unity between the two poles of our experience.^{[38]:Chapter 4}

Truth, for Steiner, is paradoxically both an objective discovery and yet "a free creation of the human spirit, that never would exist at all if we did not generate it ourselves. The task of understanding is not to replicate in conceptual form something that already exists, but rather to create a wholly new realm, that together with the world given to our senses constitutes the fullness of reality."^[62]

A new stage of Steiner's philosophical development is expressed in his *Philosophy of Freedom*. Here, he further explores potentials within thinking: freedom, he suggests, can only be approached asymptotically and with the aid of the "creative activity" of thinking. Thinking can be a free deed; in addition, it can liberate our will from its subservience to our instincts and drives. Free deeds, he suggests, are those for which we are fully conscious of the motive for our action; freedom is the spiritual activity of penetrating with consciousness our own nature and that of the world,^[63] and the real activity of acting in full consciousness.^{[38]:133–4} This includes overcoming influences of

both heredity and environment: "To be free is to be capable of thinking one's own thoughts – not the thoughts merely of the body, or of society, but thoughts generated by one's deepest, most original, most essential and spiritual self, one's individuality."^[6]

Steiner affirms Darwin's and Haeckel's evolutionary perspectives but extends this beyond its materialistic consequences; he sees human consciousness, indeed, all human culture, as a product of natural evolution that transcends itself. For Steiner, nature becomes self-conscious in the human being. Steiner's description of the nature of human consciousness thus closely parallels that of Solovyov.^[64]

In human beings, the absolute subject-object appears *as such*, i.e. as pure spiritual activity, containing all of its own objectivity, the whole process of its natural manifestation, but containing it totally ideally – in consciousness....The subject knows here only its own activity as an objective activity (*sub specie object*). Thus, the original identity of subject and object is restored in philosophical knowledge.^[65]

Spiritual science

In his earliest works, Steiner already spoke of the "natural and spiritual worlds" as a unity.^[23] From 1900 on, he began lecturing about concrete details of the spiritual world(s), culminating in the publication in 1904 of the first of several systematic presentations, his *Theosophy: An Introduction to the Spiritual Processes in Human Life and in the Cosmos*, followed by *How to Know Higher Worlds* (1904/5), *Cosmic Memory* (a collection of articles written between 1904 and 1908), and *An Outline of Esoteric Science* (1910). Important themes include:

- the human being as body, soul and spirit;
- the path of spiritual development;
- spiritual influences on world-evolution and history; and
- reincarnation and karma.

Steiner emphasized that there is an objective natural and spiritual world that can be known, and that perceptions of the spiritual world and incorporeal beings are, under conditions of training comparable to that required for the natural sciences, including self-discipline, replicable by multiple observers. It is on this basis that spiritual science is possible, with radically different epistemological foundations than those of natural science.

For Steiner, the cosmos is permeated and continually transformed by the creative activity of non-physical processes and spiritual beings. For the human being to become conscious of the objective reality of these processes and beings, it is necessary to creatively enact and reenact, within, their creative activity. Thus objective spiritual knowledge always entails creative inner activity.^[23] Steiner articulated three stages of any creative deed:^{[38]:Pt II, Chapter 1}

- Moral intuition: the ability to discover or, preferably, develop valid ethical principles;
- Moral imagination: the imaginative transformation of such principles into a concrete intention applicable to the particular situation (situational ethics); and
- Moral technique: the realization of the intended transformation, depending on a mastery of practical skills.

Steiner termed his work from this period onwards *Anthroposophy*. He emphasized that the spiritual path he articulated builds upon and supports individual freedom and independent judgment; for the results of spiritual research to be appropriately presented in a modern context they must be in a form accessible to logical understanding, so that those who do not have access to the spiritual experiences underlying anthroposophical research can make independent evaluations of the latter's results.^[38] Spiritual training is to support what Steiner considered the overall purpose of human evolution, the development of the mutually interdependent qualities of love and freedom.^[6]

Steiner and Christianity

In 1899 Steiner experienced what he described as a life-transforming inner encounter with the being of Christ; previously he had little or no relation to Christianity in any form. Then and thereafter, his relationship to Christianity remained entirely founded upon personal experience, and thus both non-denominational and strikingly different from conventional religious forms.^[6] Steiner was then 38, and the experience of meeting the Christ occurred after a tremendous inner struggle. To use Steiner's own words, the "experience culminated in my standing in the spiritual presence of the Mystery of Golgotha in a most profound and solemn festival of knowledge."^[66]

Christ and human evolution

Steiner describes Christ's being and mission on earth as having a central place in human evolution:^[67]

"The being of Christ is central to *all* religions, though called by different names by each. Every religion is valid and true for the time and cultural context in which it was born. Historical forms of Christianity need to be transformed considerably in our times in order to meet the on-going evolution of humanity."

Steiner saw this being that unifies all religions – and not a particular religious faith – as the central force in human evolution. He believed that Jesus' incarnation occurred, and that it was a pivotal point in human history. For Steiner, the "Christ Being" not only redeemed the Fall from Paradise, but that Jesus was also the unique pivot and meaning of earth's evolutionary processes and human history.^[67] In Steiner's esoteric cosmology, the spiritual development of humanity is interwoven in and inseparable from the cosmological development of the universe. Continuing the evolution that led to humanity being born out of the natural world, the Christ being brings an impulse enabling human consciousness of the forces that act creatively, but unconsciously, in nature.^[68]

To be "Christian" is, for Steiner, a search for balance between polarizing extremes^{[67]:102–3} and the ability to manifest love in freedom.^[6]

Divergence from conventional Christian thought

Steiner's views of Christianity diverge from conventional Christian thought in key places, and include gnostic elements.^[60] One of the central points of divergence is found in Steiner's views on reincarnation and karma.

Steiner also posited two different Jesus children involved in the Incarnation of the Christ: one child descended from Solomon, as described in the Gospel of Matthew; the other child from Nathan, as described in the Gospel of Luke.^[49] He references in this regard the fact that the genealogies in these two gospels list twenty-six (Luke) to forty-one (Matthew) completely different ancestors for the generations from David to Jesus. See Genealogy of Jesus for alternative explanations of this radical divergence.

Steiner's view of the second coming of Christ is also unusual. He suggested that this would not be a physical reappearance, but rather, meant that the Christ being would become manifest in non-physical form, in the "etheric realm" – i.e. visible to spiritual vision and apparent in community life – for increasing numbers of people, beginning around the year 1933. He emphasized that the future would require humanity to recognize this Spirit of Love in all its genuine forms, regardless of how this is named. He also warned that the traditional name, "Christ", might be used, yet the true essence of this Being of Love ignored.^[60]

The Christian Community

In the 1920s, Steiner was approached by Friedrich Rittelmeyer, a Lutheran pastor with a congregation in Berlin. Rittelmeyer asked if it was possible to create a more modern form of Christianity. Soon others joined Rittelmeyer – mostly Protestant pastors and theology students, but including several Roman Catholic priests. Steiner offered counsel on renewing the sacraments of their various services, combining Catholicism's emphasis on the rites of a sacred tradition with the emphasis on freedom of thought and a personal relationship to religious life. He dubbed this "modern, Johannine Christianity".^[49]

Steiner made it clear, however, that the resulting movement for the renewal of Christianity, which became known as "The Christian Community", was a personal gesture of help to a movement founded by Rittelmeyer and others independently of the Anthroposophical Society.^[49] The distinction was important to Steiner because he sought with Anthroposophy to create a scientific, not faith-based, spirituality.^[67] For those who wished to find more traditional forms, however, a renewal of the traditional religions was also a vital need of the times.

Reception

Steiner's work has influenced a broad range of noted personalities. These include philosophers Albert Schweitzer, Owen Barfield and Richard Tarnas,^[23] writers Saul Bellow,^[69] Michael Ende,^[70] Selma Lagerlöf,^[71] Andrej Belyj,^{[72][73]} David Spangler, and William Irwin Thompson;^[23] artists Josef Beuys,^[74] Wassily Kandinsky,^{[75][76]} and Murray Griffin;^[77] esotericist and educationalist George Trevelyan;^[78] actor and acting teacher Michael Chekhov;^[79] cinema director Andrei Tarkovsky;^[80] composers Jonathan Harvey^[81] and Viktor Ullmann^[82]; and conductor Bruno Walter.^[83] Olav Hammer, though sharply critical of esoteric movements generally, terms Steiner "arguably the most historically and philosophically sophisticated spokesperson of the Esoteric Tradition."^[84]

Albert Schweitzer wrote that he and Steiner had in common that they had "taken on the life mission of working for the emergence of a true culture enlivened by the ideal of humanity and to encourage people to become truly thinking beings".^[85]

Robert Todd Carroll has said of Steiner that "Some of his ideas on education – such as educating the handicapped in the mainstream – are worth considering, although his overall plan for developing the spirit and the soul rather than the intellect cannot be admired".^[86]

Scientism

Olav Hammer critiques as scientism Steiner's claim to use a scientific methodology to investigate spiritual phenomena based upon his claims of clairvoyant experience.^[84] Steiner regarded the "observations" of spiritual research as more dependable (and above all, consistent) than observations of physical reality yet considered spiritual research as fallible^[11] and, perhaps surprisingly, held the view that anyone capable of thinking logically was in a position to correct errors by spiritual researchers.^[87]

Race and ethnicity

Steiner's work includes both universalist, humanist elements and historically influenced racial assumptions.^[88] Due to the contrast and even contradictions between these elements, "whether a given reader interprets Anthroposophy as racist or not depends upon that reader's concerns."^[89] Steiner considered that every people, by dint of a shared language and culture, has a unique essence, which he called its soul or spirit,^[84] saw race as a physical manifestation of humanity's spiritual evolution and at times discussed race in terms of complex hierarchies largely derived from nineteenth century biology, anthropology, philosophy, and Theosophy, yet he consistently and explicitly subordinated race, ethnicity, gender—indeed, all hereditary factors—to individual factors in development.^[89] For Steiner, human individuality is centered in a person's unique biography, an individuality's experiences and development not bound by a single lifetime, not the qualities of the physical body.^[24] More specifically:

- Steiner occasionally characterized specific races, nations, and ethnicities in ways that have been termed racist by critics^[90] including descriptions of certain races and ethnic groups as flowering, others as backward, destined to disappear, or even degenerate;^[89] and presented explicitly hierarchical views of the spiritual evolution of different races,^[91] including—at times, and inconsistently—portraying the white race, European culture, or Germanic culture as representing the high point of human evolution as of the early 20th century, though describing these as destined to be superseded by future cultures.^[89]

- Throughout his life Steiner consistently emphasized the core spiritual unity of all the world's peoples and sharply criticized racial prejudice. He articulated beliefs that the individual nature of any person stands higher than any racial, ethnic, national or religious affiliation.^{[7][49]} His belief that race and ethnicity are transient and superficial, not essential aspects of the individual^[89] was partly rooted in his conviction that each individual incarnates in a variety of different peoples and races over successive lives, and that each of us thus bears within him- or herself the heritage of many races and peoples.^{[89][92]} Toward the end of his life, Steiner predicted that race will rapidly lose any remaining significance for future generations.^[89] In Steiner's view, culture is universal, and explicitly not ethnically based; he saw Goethe and idealist philosophy, in particular, as the source of ideas that could be drawn upon by any culture, and vehemently critiqued imperialism.^[93]

In the context of his ethical individualism, Steiner considered "race, folk, ethnicity and gender" to be general, describable categories into which individuals may choose to fit, but from which free human beings can and will liberate themselves.^[24]

Judaism

During the years when Steiner was best known as a literary critic, he published a series of articles attacking various manifestations of antisemitism^[94] and criticizing some of the most prominent anti-Semites of the time as "barbaric" and "enemies of culture".^[95] On a number of occasions, Steiner suggested that Jewish cultural and social life had lost all contemporary relevance^[96] and promoted full assimilation of the Jewish people into the nations in which they lived. This stance has come under severe criticism in recent years.^[89]

Steiner was a critic of his contemporary Theodor Herzl's goal of a Zionist state, as well as of any other ethnically determined nation, as he considered ethnicity to be an outmoded basis for social life and national identity.^[97]

Towards the end of his life and after his death, massive defamatory press attacks against Steiner were undertaken by early National Socialist leaders (including Adolf Hitler) and by other right-wing nationalists. These criticized Steiner's thought and Anthroposophy as being incompatible with National Socialist racist ideology and charged both that Steiner was influenced by his close connections with Jews and that he was himself Jewish.^{[30][95]}

2011 Exhibition

The one hundred and fiftieth anniversary of Rudolf Steiner's birth was marked by the first major retrospective exhibition of his life's work, 'Kosmos', at the Kunstmuseum in Stuttgart, Germany in 2011.^[98] The exhibition presented many facets of Steiner's life and achievements, including his influence on architecture, furniture design, dance (Eurythmy), education, and agriculture (Biodynamic agriculture). The travelling exhibition was organized by Vitra Design Museum, Germany using its own collection as well as items on loan.^[98]

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- Welburn, Andrew, *Rudolf Steiner's Philosophy and the Crisis of Contemporary Thought*, ISBN 0-86315-436-0
- Wilkinson, Roy, *Rudolf Steiner: An Introduction to his Spiritual World-View*, ISBN 1-902636-28-7

External links

General

- Rudolf Steiner Overview (<http://www.RudolfSteinerWeb.com/>)
- The Anthroposophical Society in America (<http://www.anthroposophy.org/>)
- Goetheanum (<http://www.goetheanum.org/45.html?L=1>)
- Official site of the Rudolf Steiner Archive (<http://www.rudolf-steiner.com>) (German language)

Writings

- The Rudolf Steiner Online Archive (<http://www.rsarchive.com/>) with English translations of many of Steiner's works
- Steiner lending library (<http://rslibrary.anthroposophy.org/>)
- Rudolf Steiner Audio (<http://rudolfsteineraudio.com/>)
- A list of all known English translations (http://www.rudolfsteinerweb.com/Rudolf_Steiner_Works.php)
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